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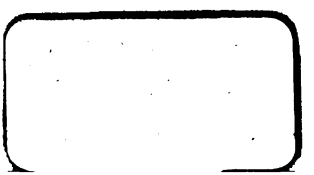

Man-Song

by

John G. Neihardt

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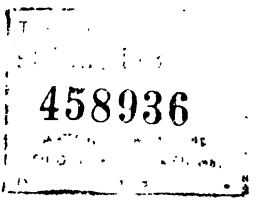

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To

Mona,

wife and comrade.

MAN-SONG

I

A VISION OF WOMAN

I LOVE you. Do you smile? Ah, well you may;
You who have heard the beast in many men
Mouth glibly that sweet spirit phrase so oft.
It is a word you scoff at here, I know.
And yet—when one dreams sleepless all the night,
Somehow a sense of the eternal things
Creeps in upon him, and the old beast sleeps,
And spirits wise with time speak in the hush.

It seems a life has passed since yestereve;
'Twas then I met you—just a night ago.
How little can a clock-gong measure dreams!

You sat beneath the tawdry glare of gas
Among the weary painted woman-flowers,
Exhaling sickly scents. And to the tune
Of shrill barbaric fiddles, squawking horns,
And that piano the mulatto played,

(Nay, smitten by the devil's dancing feet!)
The haggard creatures wreathed the dizzy dance
Like damned flowers blowing in a wind of Hell!

Sin errant rides for heavens built of mist;
But once, oh, once Sin led me to the goal!

I saw you—eyes of blue and hair of gold
And cheeks whereon the country's kiss still lived;
And round you, somehow, the effluvium
Of green things growing hopeful in the sun.
And as I gazed upon you, o'er me came
The drone of cornfields in the warm damp night,
And far away I saw the shimmering wheat,
And breathed the damp of fresh-turned garden earth.
And oh, your eyes brought back into my blood
The odor of chaste violets in the shade.
So all my thirsty soul cried out to you,
The one green spot amid an arid place.

And yet—I did not love you then as now.
The smouldering ashes of old primal lusts
The strident fiddles wakened, and the wine.
It was a thirst for rivers of delight,
A tiger hunger for the warm red feast.
And so I bought you—paid the stated price—
Washed out my scruples in a flood of wine.
Then all the smell of violets died out,
And all the visioned fields of growing things
Turned into singeing flame; and all the world

Went stifling hot and red and choked with scent
Of unimaginable blooms of Death!
And then when I had borne you from the place
Of glare and noise, where painted lilies swayed
Unto the shrieking hell-wind of the fiddles,
You seemed the one great rose of all the world,
The scarlet flower of Eros in a waste.

Oh, I was as a flame to wreathe you round,
Consume you, die amid the ashes of you!
And then—Oh like the dropping of the veil
From off some master's finished dream in stone—
You flung those garish strumpet garments off
And stood before me!
So would April look
If all the lure and wonder of that time
Could flesh itself in woman! And I knew
'Twas thus of old the maiden Lais stood,
Fresh from the wholesome glad Sicilian fields,
Before Apelles quickened with his dream.
And somehow spring crept back into the world,
Filling the hot autumnal hollow of it.
It seemed the time when maples ooze their sap,
When humid winds of promise sing all night
Beneath the stars that run aghast through mist:
When rivers wake and burst their shrouds of ice
To boom down swollen channels. Cherry bows
Flung to the winds their odorous living snows,
And apple blossoms drifted in the breeze,

Pink as the buds that tipped your spotless breasts.
And up the spring-sweet vistas of the dream
Old Greece came back with all her purple bays,
Her ships of venture and her fighting men,
Her sculptors and her painters and her bards,
Her temples and her ever-living gods,
Her women whom to name must be to sing.

I touched you—and 'twas Helen that I touched;
And in my blood young Paris lived again;
And all the grief and gloom of Ilium,
Her wailing wives enslaved to foreign lords,
Her stricken warriors and her gutted fanes,
Her song-built towers falling in the smoke,
And all the anguish of her tragic Queen,
Seemed naught for one round burning kiss from you!

You thought it was the wine; ah, so it was—
The wine of woman fraught with life and death,
The wine of beauty and the wine of gloom.

You laughed; and Greece with all her purple bays,
Her laughter and her weeping, went to dust;
And through the red choked hollow of the world
A hot storm grumbled up. We two alone
In some tremendous lightning-riven night
Burned flame-like each to each. And then the storm,
Whipped on by many blood-red rapid swords,
That ripped the gloom from unimagined gulfs,
Burst o'er the desert reaches of the world!

But when the quiet came, and down the night
The awful music of our youth died out,
And in the gloomy hollow lived no sound
Except the sullen thunder of our hearts,
Your languid kissing mouth seemed like a wound
Wet with the blood of something I had killed!
And oh, the while you stroked my dampened hair,
Lisping delirious nothings, o'er me came
The still sad singing of the things that are.

Close nestled in the hollow of my arm,
You slept like any weary little girl,
Unconscious of the ancient weight you bore.
But I lay wakeful with the ghostly years.

Above the glooming surf of yesterdays
The faces of dear women that are dead
Bloomed beacon-like, and lit with ghastly glare
The wreck-strewn coasts of the eternal sea!
Faces of patient woe and wise with grief,
Faces from which my mother gazed at me,
Faces that were one face with that of Christ!
And some with haggard unforgetting eyes
Haunted far sea-rims, gray with ships of mist;
And some were drawn and white above the slain,
With sick lips mumbling kisses of farewell;
And in them all the wistful mother-light.
Once more for me the Carthaginian pyre
Built day amid the dusk of sordid things;
And that sad Queen whom all the world shall love

Because one man forsook her, far away
Followed with tearless tragic eyes the sail
That bellied skyward in a wind of Fate.
And through the night the wail of Hecuba
Brought back the Thracian sorrow, made it mine:
And in the aching hush that followed it
Red drop by drop I heard the Virgin's blood.
Fair Phryne came and bared her breast to me
With ancient sorrow pleading in her gaze
And on her painted cheeks my sister's tears.
And one with ashen face and tiger eyes
Held huddled close the remnant of her brood.
One, pale above a loom, with nervous hands
Wove and unwove the shroud of each day's hope,
One web with Woman's weaving. Hand in hand,
The Roman wife, the subtle Queen of Nile,
Walked down the night—one woman at the last.
And haloed round with an eternal spring,
Rode she with whom all men have sinned; her face
Foreshadowed with the doom that was to be:
And aged with more than years, unqueened, and yet
Ten times the former queen, I heard her sob
Amid the cloistral gloom at Almesbury.
And oh, I saw upon a mystic sea
A rose-souled lily fleshed into a girl,
Tall as a fighting man and terrible
With all the keen clean beauty of a sword,
That one who took the luring mystic cup
And drank of it, and thirsted evermore.

From myriad graves they came, till night was day
Lit with the radiance of them. Queens and slaves;
Sweet maidens with the life-dawn in their eyes;
Mothers with babes at breast and painted harlots;
Unsung forgotten daughters of the ground,
Dumb under burdens, with dull questioning eyes
That stared uncomprehending upon Fate.

All lifted up imploring arms to me—
These patient servants in the House of Life—
And over them a wind of music went,
The crooning of the mothers of the Race.

The vision passed. Out in the quiet night
Across the huddled roofs the clock-gong tolled.
I raised the blind. The tremulous woman-star,
Like a great tear moon-smitten, watched the town,
And thin soft whispers prophesied the dawn.

Bathed in the pure light of the eternal stars
You lay asleep—a chiselled Parian dream,
A spotless vase of sleeping sacred fire,
A still white awe! No vandal hand had filched
The meaning from the breasts that might not know
The sad sweet thrill of nurture. With cool lips
That yearned with primal worshippings, I kissed them;
And, though you slept, the tender mother arm,
Wise with old memories, sought the restless babe.

God makes you mothers spite of milkless breasts!
He only knows how sterile gardens dream
Of bloom flung riot: how through arid night
The wooing rain comes kissing like a ghost,
Unfruitful kisses!
Oh that you might know
The cleansing wonder quickening in your blood,
The sweet dream fleshing with the passing moons,
The wild red pang, the first thin strangled cry
From world to world, the great white after-peace!

Across the awful slumber of your face
God moved amid the star-sheen. Something pure
Wailed down the vast hushed hollows of my soul:
Oh better that this lovely vase be shattered,
Its sacred fire be spilled upon the night,
Snatched back into the cosmic fountain-urn,
Than that another sun should look upon it
Defiled with heathen worship!

Yet 'tis said
No thing of beauty ever is defiled,
Somehow far off discordant sounds are wed,
Somewhere far off the broken rays converge.

But oh, I saw you sitting in the sun
Before a green-girt cottage with your babes;
And grapes dreamed purple in the afternoon,
And there were bees abroad and smell of fruit;

And up the shimmering hillside went the man—
Stamped with the kinship of the giving Earth,
The old Antæan wisdom in his heart—
Glad in the billowing furrow turned for you.

See! stealing o'er the melancholy roofs
The gray light, like the aching backward creep
Of some familiar sorrow!

Oh the grapes
That never sun shall purple!
It is day.

II

WOMAN-WINE

I

OH, again I see it, touch it,
Fatal cup with many a name;
Make it mine and madly clutch it,
Drink its blasting draught of flame!

Cup of grief and cup of woe,
Cup of ancient woman-wine:
Victor in mine overthrow—
It is mine!

Awful burning lips of Thais,
Kiss me back Persepolis!
Break my heart—I'm Menelaus!
Make me Paris with a kiss!

Smiling Thing with painted heart,
Canker at the soul of Peace,
Thou hast wakened by thine art
All the wanton flutes of Greece!

Lest I kill thee in my fury
Let the heaped white wonders speak:
Awe me as the ancient jury—
Phryne, make me weak!

Asker, Taker, Devil-Woman,
Hiss the hellish wish again!
Death fleshed out to mask as human,
Dancer for the heads of men!

Honied Wooer, Victor-Slayer,
Sing me drowsy, take my sword!
I am paid, O sweet Betrayer
Awful as a battle-horde!

Ancient wine of gloom and glory
Wets thy warm, red, wooing lips:
All the scarlet Queens of Story
Touch me through thy finger-tips.

II

Nay! In gentler, sweeter fashion
How thy warm soul blossoms up!
Martyr to the deathless Passion,
Quaffer of the Iseult-cup!

Thou wert heart-sick Sappho, burning
Downward to the stern gray sea.
Thou didst soothe the Master, yearning
For the hills of Galilee.

Thou art Song and patient Sorrow,
Singing through the gloom of years;
Light of every black to-morrow,
Wise with yesterdays of tears.

Thou the doomed eternal Maiden,
Wailing by the windless sea:
Thou art Mary, sorrow-laden—
Pray for me!

Pale night-weeper at the cross,
Death for thee hath not sufficed;
Trusting through the gloom of loss,
Thou didst view the risen Christ.

Burden-bearer, Beauty-maker,
Sacred Fountain of my life;
Mighty Giver, meagre Taker—
Mother, Sister, Wife!

Oh, at last, my Heart's Desire,
Build the dream that shall endure!
Fair white Urn of Sacred Fire,
Burn me pure!

Cup of sweet felicity,
Cup of ancient woman-wine!
Vanquished in my victory—
It is mine!

III

LOVE-CRY

LURED as the Earth lures Summer,
Wooing as Sunlight the Seed—
I am the mystical Comer,
I am the Will and the Deed!

Over and over forever
The glad sad story is told;
Fleeing, escaping me never,
I am your Shower of Gold.

Subtle as April creeping
Flower-shod out of the South,
I am the Dream of your sleeping,
Fever am I at your mouth.

Like a hush that falls before singing,
Awful as death and birth,
I am the May-Fog clinging—
You are the Earth!

But lo! in my Garden of Wonder,
Under the wooing Moon,
Bursts, as from silence the thunder,
The blood-dyed flower of June!

Oh, strong as a tiger in springing,
Oh, swift as a cloud-flung fire,
Like storm-blades from sky-rifts outflinging—
I am Desire!

And mine are the pangful kisses
That waken the Dream in the Dust;
Bringer of aching blisses,
Cruel I seem as Lust.

I come like a wind of disaster,
Flinging the whips of the rain;
Oh, I am a pitiless Master—
I am glorified Pain!

This is the Story of stories—
(The Rain and the Seed and the Sod)—
Awful with glooms and glories,
These are the rites of the god!

But Oh, when the storm and its riot
Sleeps in the after-hush,
I am the dawn-filled quiet—
I am the thrush.

I am the sun to cherish,
I am the dew to feed
You with your blooms that perish,
Martyrs unto the seed!

Ancient and ending never,
This is the Law and the Plan.
Oh, you are the Woman forever—
I am the Man!

IV

GÆA, MOTHER GÆA!

GÆA, Mother Gæa, Oh, at last,
Wearied with too much seeking, here I cast
My soul, my heart, my body down on thee!
Dust of thy dust, canst thou not mother me?

Not as an infant weeping do I come;
These tears are tears of battle; like a drum
Struck by wild fighting hands my temples throb;
Sob of the breathless swordsman is my sob,
Cry of the charging spearman is my cry!

O Mother, not as one who craves to die
I fall upon thee panting! Fierce as hate,
Strong as a tiger fighting for his mate,
Soul-thewed and eager for yet one more fray—
Oh Gæa, Mother Gæa, thus I pray!

Have I not battled well?
My sword has ripped the gloom from many a hell
To let the sweet day kiss my anguished brow!
Oh, I have begged no favors until now;

Have asked no pity, though I bit the dust;
For always in my blood the battle-lust
Flung awful sword-songs down my days and nights.
But now, Oh now, of all my golden fights,
The great last fight is on me—and I pray.

Oh let my prayer enfold thee as the day,
Crush down upon thee as the murky night,
Rush over thee a thunder-gust, alight
With swift electric blades! Nay, let it be
As rain flung down upon the breast of thee!
With something of the old Uranian fire
I kiss into thee all my deep desire.

If ever in the silence round about,
Thy scarlet blossoms smote me as a shout;
If ever I have loved thee, pressed my face
Close to thy bosom in a lonesome place
And breathed thy breath with more than lover's breathing;
If ever in the spring, thy great trees, seething
With hopeful juices, felt my worship-kiss—
Grant thou the prayer that struggles out of this,
My first blood-cry for succor in a fight!

Alone I shouldered up the crushing night,
Alone I flung about me halls of day,
Unmated went I fighting on my way,
Lured on by some far-distant final good,

Warming myself by fires of shipwreck wood,
Feeding my hunger with my tiger heart.

Mother of things that yearn and grow, thou art:
The Titan brood sucked battle from thy paps!
O Mother mine, sweet-breasted with warm saps,
Once more Antæus touches thee for strength!
My victories assail me! Oh at length
My splendid isolation dies away!

For Mother, giving Mother, like the day
Flung down from midnight, She who was to be
Floods all the brooding thunder-glooms of me!
And in the noon-glow that her face hath wrought,
Stands forth the one great foe I have not fought—
The close-ranked cohorts of my selfish heart.

Suckler of virile fighting things, thou art!
Breathe in me something of the tireless sea;
The urge of mighty rivers breathe in me!
Cloak me with purple like thy haughty peaks;
Oh arm me as a wind-flung cloud that wreaks
Hell-furies down the midnight battle-murk!
Fit me to do this supreme warrior's work—
To face myself and conquer!

Mother dear,
Thou seemest a woman in this silence here;
And 'tis thy daughter who hath come to me
With all the wise, sad mother-heart of thee,
Thy luring wonder and immensity!

Oh, in her face strong sweet earth-passions brood!
I feel them as in some wild solitude
The love-sweet panting summer's yearning pain.

Teach me the passion of the wooing rain!
Teach me to fold her like the summer day—
To kiss her in the great good giant way,
Even as Uranus in the cosmos dawn!

Oh, all the mad spring revelling is gone,
And now—the wise sweet summer! Let me be
Deep-rooted in thy goodness as a tree,
Strong in the storms with skyward blossomings!
Teach me the virile trust of growing things,
The wisdom of slow fruiting in the sun!

I would be joyous as the winds that run
Light-footed on the wheatfields. Oh for her,
I would be gentle as the winds that stir
The forest in the noon hush. Lift me up!
Fill all my soul with beauty as a cup
Of cool and bubbling waters! Mother dear,
Gæa, great Gæa, 'tis thy son—Oh hear!

One flower-flung odor, sweetening all the air,
One mother-bird's note, answers me my prayer!

Even as a tiger fanged and fierce I came;
Gentler and stronger, Mother, I arise:
And now no more mine own soul's sword of flame
Can keep me from thine ancient Paradise.

V

NUPTIAL-SONG

LO! the Field that slumbered,
Sowed and winter-sealed;
Thralled and dream-encumbered!
Oh the maiden Field!
Never Thunder roused her,
Rain or yearning Fire;
Never Sun espoused her,
Virile with desire.

Yet betimes a vague thrill
Running in a thaw,
Hinted at the World-Will
And the Lyric Law:
Made her guess at splendor
Bursting out of pain;
Feel the clutching, tender
Fingers of the grain.

Now an end of dreaming!
Lo! the Lover comes—
Flame-wrought banners gleaming,

Haughty thunder-drums;
Joy- and sorrow-laden,
Eager, wondershod!
Sacrifice the Maiden
On the altar of the god!

Though he come with terror,
Though he woo with pain,
Love is never error,
Kisses never vain.
Victress in her capture,
Let the Maiden know
All the aching rapture,
All the singing woe!

Hark! the regal Thunder!
(Oh the huddled Field!)
'Tis the Night of Wonder—
Let the Maiden yield!
Oh the quiet after
All the singing pain!
Oh the rippling laughter
Of the nursing grain!

Older and yet younger,
Sadder, and yet blessed,
With a baby-hunger
Tugging at her breast,

She shall feel the Great Law—
Love and you shall grow.
Give her to the wild Awe,
Let the Maiden know!

Sweeter than all other
Songs of lip or lyre—
Every Maid a Mother,
Every Man a Sire:
Joy beneath the pain warm,
God amidst the plan;
Field unto the Rainstorm,
Maid unto the Man!

VI

PRAYER FOR PAIN

I DO not pray for peace nor ease,
Nor truce from sorrow:
No suppliant on servile knees
Begs here against to-morrow!

Lean flame against lean flame we flash,
O Fates that meet me fair;
Blue steel against blue steel we clash—
Lay on, and I shall dare!

But Thou of deeps the awful Deep,
Thou Breather in the clay,
Grant this my only prayer—Oh keep
My soul from turning gray!

For until now, whatever wrought
Against my sweet desires,
My days were smitten harps strung taut,
My nights were slumberous lyres.

And howsoe'er the hard blow rang
Upon my battered shield,
Some lark-like, soaring spirit sang
Above my battle-field.

And through my soul of stormy night
The zigzag blue flame ran.
I asked no odds—I fought my fight—
Events against a man.

But now—at last—the gray mist chokes
And numbs me. *Leave me pain!*
Oh let me feel the biting strokes
That I may fight again!

VII

BATTLE CRY

MORE than half beaten, but fearless,
Facing the storm and the night;
Breathless and reeling, but tearless,
Here in the lull of the fight,
I who bow not but before Thee,
God of the fighting Clan,
Lifting my fists I implore Thee,
Give me the heart of a Man!

What though I live with the winners
Or perish with those who fall?
Only the cowards are sinners,
Fighting the fight is all.
Strong is my Foe—he advances!
Snapt is my blade, O Lord!
See the proud banners and lances!
Oh spare me this stub of a sword!

Give me no pity, nor spare me;
Calm not the wrath of my Foe.
See where he beckons to dare me!
Bleeding, half beaten—I go.

Not for the glory of winning,
Not for the fear of the night;
Shunning the battle is sinning—
Oh spare me the heart to fight!

Red is the mist about me;
Deep is the wound in my side;
'Coward' thou criest to flout me?
O terrible Foe, thou hast lied!
Here with my battle before me,
God of the fighting Clan,
Grant that the woman who bore me
Suffered to suckle a Man!

VIII

OUTWARD

WHITHER away, O Sailor, say?
Under the night, under the day,
Yearning sail and flying spray
Out of the black into the blue,
Where are the great Winds bearing you?

Never port shall lift for me
Into the sky, out of the sea!
Into the blue or into the black,
Onward, outward, never back!
Something mighty and weird and dim
Calls me under the ocean rim!

Sailor under sun and moon,
'Tis the ocean's fatal rune.
Under yon far rim of sky
Twice ten thousand others lie.
Love is sweet and home is fair,
And your mother calls you there.

Onward, outward I must go
Where the mighty currents flow.

Home is anywhere for me
On this purple-tented sea.
Star and Wind and Sun my brothers,
Ocean one of many mothers.
Onward under sun and star
Where the weird adventures are!
Never port shall lift for me—
I am Wind and Sky and Sea!

IX

APRIL THEOLOGY

OH, to be breathing and hearing and feeling and seeing!
Oh the ineffably glorious privilege of being!
All of the World's lovely girlhood, unfleshed and made spirit,
Broods out in the sunlight this morning—I see it, I hear it!

So read me no text, O my Brothers, and preach me no creeds;
I am busy beholding the glory of God in His deeds!
See! Everywhere buds coming out, blossoms flaming, bees humming!
Glad athletic Growers up-reaching, things striving, becoming!

Oh, I know in my heart, in the sun-quickened, blossoming soul of me,
This something called self is a part, but the World is the whole of me!

I am one with these growers, these singers, these earnest becomers—
Co-heirs of the summer to be and past æons of summers!

I kneel not nor grovel; no prayer with my lips shall I fashion.
Close-knit in the fabric of things, fused with one common passion—
To go on and become something greater—we Growers are one;
None more in the World than a bird and none less than the sun;
But all woven into the glad indivisible Scheme,
God fashioning out in the Finite a part of his Dream!

Out here where the world-love is flowing, unfettered, unpriced,
I feel all the depth of the man-soul and girl-heart of Christ!
'Mid this riot of pink and white flame in this miracle weather,
Soul to soul, merged in one, God and I dream the vast Dream together.
We are one in the doing of things that are done and to be:
I am part of my God as a raindrop is part of the Sea!

What! House me my God? Take me in where
no blossoms are blowing?
No riot of green and no sky, and no bird-song, no
growing?
Parcel out what is already mine, like a vender of
staples?
*See! Yonder my God burns revealed in the sap-
drunken maples!*

X

CZOLGOSZ

HE murdered! Hasten! Let the Nation kill!
A godly State, we wield the chastening rod.
Dumb in the chair he waits—Oh hush, be still!
Once more a priest insults our patient God!

With fire of Heaven he withers like a leaf—
This hideous offering to our social Joss!
But, as of old, beside the punished thief,
Unseen, Christ hangs upon a neighboring cross!

This futile Brutus struck at Cæsar's life;
He killed a husband and the People's friend.
Oh, Cæsar hath not flesh to feel the knife!
Still Cæsar lives—and this is not the end!

Hark to the human groans from mire and muck!
Oh, still the streams of sunless millions flow!
He missed the tyrant's heart at which he struck,
Nor do we kill the Thing that struck the blow!

The pistol ball wounds not the vaporous mark!
Nor can the dagger pick our prison lock!
Strike Night!—you stab some brother in the dark!
And Henry Fourth survives poor Ravaillac!

XI

ON FIRST SEEING THE OCEAN

AND *this* is the dreamed-of wonder!
This—at last—is the sea!
Billows of liquid thunder—
Vocal immensity!
But where is the thrill of glory
Born of a great surprise?
This is the old, old story;
These are the ancient skies.

Child of the prairie expanses,
Often the soul of me
Hungered for long sea-glances;
And here—at last—is the sea.
Yon goes a sea-gull flying;
There is a sinking mast;
This is the ocean crying!
This is the rune of the Vast!

But out in my mother country,
Ever since I was born,
This is the song my brother Winds
Sang in the fields of corn.

And there, in the purple midnights
  Sullen and still with heat,
This is the selfsame drone that ran
  Over the heading wheat.

Ere Time, the mystical Motion,
  Mothered and cradled thee,
This was the song, O Ocean,
  That saddened the soul of me.
And I long to be as the steamer
  That dwindles, dissolves, in the Blue;
For mine is the soul of the dreamer—
  And nothing to me is new.

XII

O LYRIC MASTER!

OUT of the great wise silence, brooding and latent so long,
Burst on the world, O Master—sing us the big man-song!

Have we not piled up cities, gutted the iron hills,
Schooled with our dream the lightning and steam, giving them thoughts and wills?

Have we not laughed at Distance, belting the earth with rails?
Are we a herd of weaklings? Nay, we are masterful males!

We are the poets of matter! Latent in steel and stone,
Latent in engines and cities and ships, see how our songs have grown!

Long have we hammered and chiseled, hewn and hoisted, until—
Lo, 'neath the wondering noon of the World the visible Epic of Will!

Was it not built as the Masters build, lyric with pain and joy?
Say, is it less than the twin-built Rome, less than the song-reared Troy?

Less than an Argive wrangle, warrior and wife in a fuss?
These you sang in the ancient time—Oh, what will you sing for us?

Breathless we halt in our labor; shout us a song to cheer:
Something that's swift as a saber, keen for the mark as a spear:

Full of the echoes of battle—souls crying up from the dust!
Hungry we cried to our singers—our singers have flung us a crust!

Choked with the smoke of the battle, staggering, weary with blows,
We cried for a goblet of music: they flung us the dew of a rose!

Gewgaw goblets they gave us, jeweled and polished and fine,
And filled with the tears of a weakling: Oh, God! for a gourd—and wine!

O big wise Lyric Master, you who have seen us build,
Molding the mud with our tears and blood into the
thing we willed—

Soon shall your brooding be over, the dream shall be
ripened, and then—
Thunderous out of the silence—hurl us the Song of
Men!

XIII

LONESOME IN TOWN

THE long day wanes, the fog shuts down,
The eave-trough spouts and sputters;
The rain sighs through the huddled town
And mumbles in the gutters.

The emptied thoroughfares become
Long streams of eerie light;
They issue from the mist and, dumb,
Flow onward out of sight.

The snarling trolley grumbles past,
Its snapping wire glows;
Again where yon pale light is cast
The hackman's horses doze.

In vain the bargain windows wink,
The passers-by are few:
The grim walls stretch away and shrink
In dull electric blue.

A stranger hurries down the street,
  Hat dripping, face aglow:
O happy feet, O homing feet,
  I know where mine would go!

For oh, far over hills and dells
  The cows come up the lane,
With steaming flanks and fog-dulled bells
  A-tinkle in the rain.

XIV

SONG OF THE TURBINE WHEEL

HEARKEN the bluster and brag of the Mill!
The heart of the Mill am I,
Doomed to toil in the dark until
The springs of the world run dry;
With never a ray of sun to cheer
And never a star for lamp!
It cries its song in the great World's ear—
I toil in the dark and damp.

And ever the storm-clouds cast their showers
And the brook laughs loud in the sun,
To goad me on through the dizzy hours
That the will of the Mill be done!
And that is why I groan at work;
For deep down under the flood I lurk
Where the icy midnight lingers;
While *tinkle, tinkle* the waters play
To the tune of a hundred sacks a day—
All with their crystal fingers.

Oh, the waters have such a rollicking way
And they taunt me in my pain;
"'Tis thou alone art sad," they say,
"Thy rusty whine is vain;
For the grass is green and the skies are blue
And a fisherman whistled, as we came through,
A careless merry tune;
And a bevy of boys were out with their noise
In our flood made warm with June!"

And, bound as I am where the darkness lingers,
I half forgive their careless way,
Such soothing, tinkling tunes they play—
All with their icy fingers.

XV

TO MY CAT

I WATCH you basking sleepy in the light,
Majestic dreamer, humorously stern.
Your little scratch-scarred nose betrays you quite,
Yet how I long to know your thoughts, to learn
What magic dreams beget themselves and burn
Throughout your subtle nerves; for once I saw
A cat's form graven on an antique urn,
And round their god Egyptians knelt in awe.
Was once thy hiss a blight, was once thy purr a law?

Perhaps through sentient chains of linkèd ages
Your soul has fled; yet like a haunting dream
Can recollect the prayers of swarthy sages,
Can hear the wash of Nilus' mystic stream!
It seems I see you basking in the gleam
Of desert dawns. Majestical you gaze
Into the eye of Ra, and dream a dream.
Vast multitudes wait breathless in amaze
For your oraculous purr to set their hearts ablaze!

Perhaps you think "How stupid grows the world,"
And pine for godhood, till you come to be
A broken spirit, like a war flag furled,
Or drouth-drained river sighing for the sea!
What potent utterance do you waste on me
When I am kind and stroke your glossy fur?
What do you gaze on that I can not see?
Perhaps if men could know the things that were,
Their petted faiths should quake and tremble at your
purr!

XVI

TO VOLNEY STREAMER

WHEN in the tranquil æons,
Where in the cosmic plan,
How did I meet you
And know you and greet you,
Ere you were born a man?

Dim like a dream in the morning,
Blurred like a cross-writ page,
My memory clings to you,
Gropes for you, sings to you,
Friend of my yesterage!

Were we two souls in the æther
Flung from a central Soul?
In the vaults of the Blue
Did I first find you,
Where the great sun-rivers roll?

Did we together wander
Unto the gates of the earth,
Longing for breath
And the wisdom of death,
Seeking the boon of birth?

Where did we meet thereafter?
Why do you serve me so?
What have I wrought for you?
Could I have fought for you,
Died for you, ages ago?

Once in a city of wonders,
Was I a poet-king?
And were you a lad
Of the sheep-lands, mad—
Mad with the passion to sing?

And could I have heard your piping
(Oh, the centuries since!)
Bid my horns blown for you,
Shared my proud throne with you,
Clad you with purple, a prince?

Where does our dust lie buried?
When shall it all be clear?
From There and Then,
Oh, how and when
Did we come to the Now and Here?

It is dim like a dream in the morning;
It is blurred like a cross-writ page:
Yet—somehow I cling to you,
Grope for you, sing to you—
Friend of my yesterage!

XVII

THE MEMORY

LONG since the ruined town we fled,
And dust heaps mark the spot
Where you and I clasped hands and said,
"My friend, forget me not."

The shout of War was loud at heel,
The foeman pressed behind;
Then you and I turned round with steel
To meet the Future—blind!

I do not know what foes we fought
Nor when we gained release;
I only know with pain we bought
The ultra-stellar Peace.

I touch your hand—old sorrows wake,
Like smoke the long night lifts;
And Oh, the faint far bugles make
Weird music through the rifts!

XVIII

THE OLD CRY

O MOURNER in the silence of the hills,
O Thing of ancient griefs, art thou a wolf?
I heard a cry that shook me—was it thine?

Low in the mystic purple of the west
The weird moon hangs, a tarnished silver slug;
Vast, vast the hollow empty night curves down,
Stabbed with the glass-like glinting of the stars,
And save when that wild cry grows up anon,
No sound but this dull murmur of the hush—
The winter hush.

Hark! Once again thy cry!
Thy strange, sharp, icelike, tenuous complaint,
As though the spirit of this frozen waste,
Pinched with the cruel frost, yearned summerward!
I know thou art a wolf that criest so.
Though hidden in the shadow, I can see
Thy four feet huddled in the numbing frost,
Thy snout, breath-whitened, pointing to the sky:
Poor pariah of the plains, I know 'tis thou.

And yet—and yet—*I heard a kinsman shout!*
Down through the intricate centuries it came,
A far-blown cry! From old world graves it grew,
Up through the tumbled walls of ancient realms,
Up through the lizard-haunted heaps of stone,
The pitiful débris where Grandeur dwelt:
Out of the old-world wilderness it grew—
The cry I know! And I have heard my Kin.

XIX

AT SUNRISE

TWIXT midnight and the dawn a weirdness falls;
In hush of wonder, night-winds softlier blow:
A far cock hails the wane of night—and lo!
An eerie dream-horn through the silence calls.
Through the thin air faint drones of meaning go;
Capricious gusts wake drowsily and run
Across the dusky fields to prophesy the sun.

I, wakened by the spirit of the time,
Slough off the drowse, as soul doth flesh at last;
Over the window-sill myself I cast;
With feet of awe that seem not mine, I climb
The hill moon-washed and silent. All is past—
The bitter longing and the dull delay,
The fever that is wrought of dream and clay.

Grown strangely big and cognizant, I stand
No more a thing of hours and sordid miles,
No more the slave of sought-for afterwhiles:
I seem to hear and half way understand

The wash of æther upon stellar isles!
Entempled 'twixt the sky and summit there
I know what makes men rear their domes of prayer.

Dawn-blanched the slinking moon to westward dips:
Across enchanted hills from some far farm
A dog bays out its sense of vague alarm.
I hear a sigh as though from Titan lips,
Yearning for speech, yet fettered with a charm;
Speech which, it seems, if I could only hear,
Would make death seem less cold and life less dear.

If this could last, it seems that I might lay
My hand on God and understand the Scheme;
But breaking in upon my groping dream
Now blares the scarlet music of the Day.
Drenched with the dew and shivering, I seem
A wailer in a bitter scheme of mud,
A hope half strangled in a stream of blood!

And yet—the birds are singing to the sun!
With clank of harness and a whistled lay
The plowman goes afield, as glad he may,
While I am wishing that the day were done!
What is it that the wild bees strive to say?
Would I could hear with some sixth, subtler sense
The meadow-lark's glad shouting from the fence!

XX

UNREST

SO long my pulse has thundered with the deeds
Of vanished victors, thoughts of mighty men;
My heart beat is the echo of fierce steeds
Flung at the foe by Hun or Saracen!
Within me fallen kings arise again
And move by night ten thousand glinting spears!
The whispering feet of ghostly fighting men
Push past to dawn and death; while up the years
A wind of swords blows back the tang of women's tears.

I long for glorious breath that is no more;
I pine for wild ecstatic fights that blew
Storm-like through classic lands with mighty war
When life was fresher and the gods were true.
A shadow of the past I blunder through
The dreamless world of busy men: I sigh
For golden forms of old; I search the blue
In vain with rapturous gazing to descry
Where Eos thrills with bare bright breast the morning sky.

Oh, would I were a faun with oaten pipe
Fluting wild life out by Ionic rills;
Dancing amid the vines when grapes are ripe,
Hearing the shepherd's song upon the hills:
Or gazing down some shaded stream where thrills
The conscious silence with the rapturous sense
Of some bare form among the daffodils!
But now the world seems godless, dreamless, dense
With mortals dragging lives unlovely and intense.

Yet—what avail the pang that longing wakes,
The hope that fails, the madness of despair,
The short quick consciousness of flesh that aches?
Has not my Soul adventurous paths to dare?
A throb of that warm Pulse that thrills the fair
Harmonious systems, I am boundless—free!
I linger as a drop of water where
The eddies fret; yet daily come to me
The strong pulsations from the deep mysterious Sea!

XXI

THE FIRST PRAYER

LIFE blinded me, and I was prone to stray
Down the dim ways of old philosophies.
Although I loved the scintillating day
And caught the wordless hymning of the trees,
Still went I seeking 'mid weird mysteries
That cling about the ruined piles of Eld—
The Brahmin's mystic writ, and the Parsee's
Seer-visioned tomes; wide-eyed with wonder spelled
Their jargon old to learn what caused all I beheld.

In old pagodas with the mystic dead
My spirit knelt in contemplation deep;
Lisping the words the mighty Manou said,
Craving the boon of everlasting sleep.
Out of the snarl and tangle and the sweep
Of pangful being, my soul sought to see
Nirvana's calm and awful dawning creep.
In vain I cried unto the tranquil Three.
I found my altars cold. The spell was not for me.

I read, I dreamed, I all but prayed, until
My brain was shaken with its warring dreams.
I saw the Evening flush the western hill
With burning footstep; heard the cry of streams
Like music in my pulse; the Morning's beams
Went through my blood like Soma's golden brew:
And my soul swelled with sudden joy, as streams
Swell with the spring-thaw! And 'twas then I knew,
O God, tho' lips were dumb, my heart had prayed
to You!

XXII

MOTHER

O Link that united the Infinite Sea,
The Unconscious Pulse with the conscious and free,
That bound—and made possible me:

If I be a melody, thou wert the lyre
To which spoke the fingers of passionate fire.

If I be a star, thou wert Chaos for me;
The Nebula's passion for form grew in thee,
Ere the Infinite dwindled to me.

XXIII

WHAT THE MOTHER-SOUL SAYS

SLEEP, Little Stem, with the mother-dream
That I shall shape for you.
The sun is soft on the silvery stream,
And the wind shall bring you a tune for the dream.
Dream of the bud that awakes in you.
Dream—and it shall be true!

The years have toiled and the seasons died
To make you a time to be,
And a tearful spirit has prophesied
Of you in the summer sea:
For you are a part of the great warm Vast
From the worm at your root to the Sun above you;
And it softly croons "At last, at last,
We shall breathe of your flower and love you!"

XXIV

ON HEARING A VIOLIN

O Woman-Singer, art thou quick or dead?
What strange wise soul is this that soars and sings,
Builds up these raptured minarets and spires,
These dim and sounding vaults of wild amaze,
These domes of worship burned with mystic fire,
These dusky halls of long-forgotten grief
Where tragic laughters echo, lingering?

Is it the wizard's fingers on the strings,
The knowing bow-arm, wise with suffering?
Thou criest as a thing that hath a heart.
For thou dost sing the sunlight and the gloom,
The music of the shallows and the deeps,
The laughter and the weeping of my life.
It seems that thou hast searched my soul for this.

Where hast thou learned the story of the World,
Its epic struggle and its lyric pain?
What human heart unlocked itself for thee?

Hark! 'Tis a sobbing woman, lorn of love!
A wind of sighing wakens from dead years
And blows a rain of tears across the World!

Dead women weep through long-forgotten wars
In towns where Winds take hands with Dust and dance
The mournful measure of a threnody.
Hoar Ages lift their dusty heads and chant,
Like ghosts whose throats the grave-rot fills and chokes,
The melancholy story of the race.

A wind of trumpets wakens! Hark the tread
Of Pride and Power! Armies rumble past!
What King of ruined cities passes now
That thus the haughty banners flaunt the sun,
Grown older now by ages? Glint of blades,
Keen, thin like Hunger; eager, pale like Hate,
They weave a lustrous name I cannot read.

A moaning windlike, dim, lugubrious!
The King has fallen to dust that whisks and sighs
About the throne where lizards take the sun!
The wailing of old gods among the shrines
Where bats with tumbling and irreverent flight
Disturb the ashes of neglected fires!

A space of night.

What timorous point of light
Peers through the dusk? What growing voices wake
From creatures huddled in the faithless dark,
Hungry for worship? Clear and bugle-like,
The song of Dawn awakens! Awful, bright,
Some strange new god heaves up a star-crowned head
And fills the World with symphonies of hope!
And now—a sighing of the wings of Time.
A snarl of notes—gloom—gloom—the god is dead.

A buzzing sound of anger from the North
Blown southward! Pitiless as driving sleet
The beast-men of the wilderness swoop down
Athwart the belt of sunlight, where the vines
And olives glad the hillsides, and fair cities
Doze idly upon bays of purple ease!
A cry of men grown weak with luxury
In marble halls and palaces of dream!
The snarl of primal brutes, fierce, envious,
Shattering into weird cacophony
The soft effeminate music of the South!

A minor wail. Gloom thickens. Is Hope dead?
Ah, slowly grows a clear soft major chord;
The World awakens with the mounting sound—
The unquenched yearning of the heart of Man.

What jarring note again? What minor cry?
Whining like fear and guttural like hate,

A rapid madness wakens in the strings!
The strife of boasting credos! Martyrs wail!
Hell hisses from piled faggots! Curses, groans,
And prayers that sting like curses! Where is Christ?
What groaning of the Earth 'neath armored feet,
Mad vintagers that trample hearts like grapes
To make a drink of frightful, sanguine ooze!

What subtle wine is this that is a sound,
Intoxicating sense with aching dreams?
I saw the Race reel drunken! Heard the shrill
Mad fiddles of the World's besotted youth!

Is it a woman singing? Gloom is passed;
A scent of spring comes over hills of dew.
Dawn hurls his Titan limbs from bed and yawns
A vapor of content across the World!

Hark! Is it children laughing? Do I dream?
The World's great Rose seems scenting all the air.

I see no more the shapely thing of wood
Caressed with melody-compelling hands.
I see a woman in a lover's arms;
Her head thrown back in ecstasy; her neck
Slender and white and shapely! Her full breast
Heaves gently with the breathing of her joy!
And moulded, as 'twere wrought to some soft tune,
Her curving waist rounds outward to the hips!

No longer can I see the bridge-reared strings,
But four bright strands of golden hair fall there
Across her face and throat and bridge of breasts!
Above her, yearning, shaken with wild joy
And lyric passion, leans the wooing lover
And listens to the melody he makes
With fingers of caress across her throat!

A disenchanting silence! Hath he ceased?

O Thing of wood and strings without a soul,
Who taught thee thus to sing that love endures?

XXV

WHEN I HAVE GONE WEIRD WAYS

WHEN I have finished with this episode,
Left the hard up-hill road,
And gone weird ways to seek another load,
O Friend, regret me not, nor weep for me—
Child of Infinity!

Nor dig a grave, nor rear for me a tomb,
To say with lying writ: "Here in the gloom
He who loved bigness takes a narrow room,
Content to pillow here his weary head—
For he is dead."

But give my body to the funeral pyre,
And bid the laughing fire,
Eager and strong and swift as my desire,
Scatter my subtle essence into Space—
Free me of Time and Place.

Sweep up the bitter ashes from the hearth!
Fling back the dust I borrowed from the Earth
Unto the chemic broil of Death and Birth—

The vast Alembic of the cryptic Scheme,
Warm with the Master-Dream!

And thus, O little House that sheltered me,
Dissolve again in wind and rain, to be
Part of the cosmic weird Economy:
And Oh, how oft with new life shalt thou lift
Out of the atom-drift!

XXVI

THE FUGITIVE GLORY

I

(*In the house of Satyra. The Youth and Satyra*)

SATYRA.

Come, brag to me some more—the grand boy brag!
Your head upon my lap—you know the way;
With something of the mother in my heart,
And something of the only son in you—
Yet so much more. Ah, need I say how much?
I have grown past the time of quick forgetting,
And noble hearts remember; yours is so.

Come, out with it upon my knee, Great Boy,
Boy only in the dreaming, man to do—
Thus ever are the victors! Out with it!
Your face, now white, now red with inner fires,
Betrays how some new flame-winged dream strains up
And lusts for fuel. Conquer me again!
Oh chant it—the new dream—in that sea-voice,
That rolling drone, not quite monotony,
Wherein one chants an epic that he loves!

How often was it so; I sitting thus,
A little languid from your lightning strokes,
Subdued by all the stormy youth of you—
As fields must be when thunder-gusts have past!
And you?—Oh quickened with the ecstasy,
All fire and wind, insistent as the Sea,
The male Sea, surging yet tho' storm be dead!
I was the field, the shore—you, storm and sea.

And when you talked of all you meant to do,
And shall do doubtless—I could close my eyes
And know why Earth smiles when the spring-winds sweep,
The glad, boy-bragging, mighty, man-strong winds—
And what the thrill of sudden thawing is.
With little effort I could feel o'er me
The running witch-fires of the violets,
The gentle sucking of the grasses' roots!

Oh Earth is old and winds are ever young—
Blow, blow upon me! I was winter-locked
These long days that you came not. Yet you came—
One word from me—you came! And it is Spring!
I feel the little rivulets of joy!
Oh drench me like a great Wind from the Sea!

THE YOUTH. (*Falteringly*) I come—

SATYRA.

What need of Spring to say 'I come'?
You merely *come!* Do Storms send up their cards,
And does a Southwind ask if Earth be in?
My Lightning and my Thunder and my Rain—
You!—Have me at once!

THE YOUTH.

I come to—

SATYRA.

Why Explain?
The big essential things ne'er stoop to that!
What! footnotes to the poetry of rain?
You knit your brows—so does the Thunder-Cloud.
Leap out, swift Thunder-Sword, and vanquish me!
No! talk to me the old big boyish way,
That somehow made me see spears foeward surge,
Slant in the war-gust as the Wind bends grain—
Massed shields advancing ponderously up
Against doomed cities—stout ships locked in fight—
Wild forlorn charges swooping through the gloom!

I come of fighters—yea, am as a shield,
Ancient and battered in a tower of peace;
A daring knightly voice resounds in me
Like ghostly sword-strokes on the tarnished brass!

And yet, I would be pliant to your mood.
How blows the wind to-day? In gusts? A gale?

A tempest or a zephyr? Like a tree
I'll blend and sway or only murmur to you!
Am I not Woman?
What! Your mood is sad?
Perhaps my dreamer's eyes have seen too far,
Gazed on the never-to-be-compassed things
One moment in the sudden giddy flare
Of inner lightnings! How I know that flash—
The homesick groping in the after-gloom!
How the horizon chokes one like a noose!
Now that I think, I also feel quite sad.
Oh talk to me as one bereft of sleep
Might to the Midnight big with patient stars!

THE YOUTH.
Oh if I could but talk so!

SATYRA.
Can you not?
See! I let down the hair you praised so oft—
Black, is it not? No single streak of gray
Flung from the dawn of disillusionment!
And here in its hushed midnight secrecy
I set this diamond starwise!

THE YOUTH.
Sirius!

SATYRA.
No, Venus moving languid through the hush;

Or is it Mars, O sweet Astrologer?
See, I am Midnight listening with a star!

THE YOUTH.
I could wish something better.

SATYRA.
Something? What?

THE YOUTH.
Stars of the spirit, quiet glooms of soul
Too deep for glitter.

SATYRA.
Lo! the Zephyr breathes,
And I'm all leafy music! Oh, breathe on!

THE YOUTH.
I came to beg forgiveness.

SATYRA.
Take it freely!

THE YOUTH.
And ask your blessing.

SATYRA.
When was it withheld?

THE YOUTH.
Forgiveness for what I have been to you,
Blessings for what I was not, but would be.

With something of the only son, no more,
I woo the mother in you—only her.
I seem as one who long has wandered drowsed
Through walled-in gardens of exotic bloom;
And smelling at last the breath of open fields,
Sickens with loathing—hates the waxen blossoms—
Lies fevered into semblances of flower,
Magnificently false and fever-pale
Or gaudily hectic!
One wild blossom's breath,
Full of the cosmic wonder, wakes at last
The sudden glory of a guess at God!
Oh I'll be rooted in the hopeful Earth,
Tuned to her growing music! I have read
Under the gentle starlight of a face
Scrolls of the spirit's shadow-charactery,
Hints of my meaning and my destiny.

SATYRA.

Caught in the snare? What sort of bird is this
That warbles of the fowler? Well—the girl!
Can I be jealous—I who have so much?
Shape me the poem of her, if you will!
The great Wind may love violets, and yet—
The tall Tree wins his music! What care I?
'Her face is as tho' ivory blushed to be
So dull a reflex of her purity!'
So runs the tune—come, I'll supply the rhymes!
Her eyes! How shall we figure them?

THE YOUTH.

You jest.

SATYRA.

No more than Nature jests when lovers coo!

THE YOUTH.

Nature a jester? Only men are so.
The sense of humor is a human thing.
The ragged weed beneath the haughty oak
Lifts its pathetic bloom with sober trust.
Birds mate and build and rear a transient brood,
Announcing to a waiting universe
With serious song the wonders they have wrought.
In mountains, seas and rivers, trees and stars,
Wherever something yearns or soars or swings,
Lifts out of gloom or fights for space to be—
A sad, far-seeing seriousness is there,
The somber vision of the epic dream.
The austere Wonder-Worker never laughs;
Sees not the thing He does to question it;
Moves in the Dream's wake onward!
I would be
Even as the oak, the ragged weed, the bird,
And all believing things that know not guile,
A follower in the Dream's wake.
Give me back
The sacred part of me I gave to you,
Blind to the beauty of it! I'm a man!

I feel the meaning of that ancient myth,
How Adam loved the woman of a dream,
Wrought of a fevered longing; woke at last,
Bathed in the wild, wan starlight of Eve's face—
Gave up without regret his Eden for her,
And from shut gates moved out upon his world.

SATYRA.

Toward sorrow, sorrow, sorrow evermore!
How Nature must have chuckled as he went—
Poor heart-sick clown of the eternal farce!

She seems a spirit wrought of dream and flame,
This Nature with her dugs of bitter milk!
Half visible, elusive, how she weaves
The strange, alluring, many-colored dream!
How virgin-like she seems! How she can blush
In subtle dawn-tints! With what purple gauze
She weaves transparent curtains for her limbs
Of maddening allurement! How she flees
In maiden terror, breathing forth the while,
Her siren-song, her Delphic utterance!
How trustingly we track her lying feet
That lead to bitter vineyards, for she seems
The vintner of a sweet red wine of life!
The dew-like sheen upon the purple grape;
The dream-tints of the peach, the scarlet song
Of apples reddening in the summer sun;
The little flowers all soul and innocence;

The emerald corn's slow growing into gold;
The face of woman—ah, the face of woman!—
Music grown flesh and flesh become a flower:
These are her lies of summer.
Autumn comes!
One aching disillusionment of frost,
And lo! the naked, hideous, tiger-scheme!
One little nip of frost—and we are wise!
See how the fair things festered 'neath the bloom
To please this cunning maniac for seed!

You are the bee, O Boy, and she the flower:
You seek her for her sweetness, and your song
Is pleasant to her. What a dream is that!
Summer eternal! Never frost for you!
Always the kissing sun, the feeding damp,
A life of soul expressed in happiness!
Faugh! *'Tis but for the pollen on your wings!*
Naked she stands—this thing that seemed a nymph,
All dew and moonlight! Nature! *See the hag!*
Fetid—a strutting womb—a suck-device—

THE YOUTH.

Enough! This is the litany of Death,
The rune of Putrefaction! Blasphemy!
It chokes me like a gust of fumes from hell!
I have forgotten how I ever loved you,
Or thought I loved you. 'Tis a nightmare now!
Great God! I praised that hair! Black, hissing

hell-snakes,
Twined round that sickly pool that is your face!
And I have lipped it—lipped it thirstily—
Lipped it—!

SATYRA.

No, no—Oh do not say you hate me!
'Twas on your lips just now—but do not say it!
A drowning man from whom some stronger swimmer
Wrenches the only plank in all the sea,
May curse God 'twixt the salty strangling gulps!
Breathe like a zephyr o'er me—and I love you!
Blow as a scathing tempest—and I love you!
I love you most in lightnings!
I am old;
You lash me with the bitter fact—I'm old!
You whip me with the words—'a sickly pool'!
Oh cleanse me!—You!—my Spring!—my Thunderstorm!
I have had dreams—they came so late—such dreams!
Dreams of a vernal cleansing—pure flowers grew
Out of me, with their roots like baby fingers
Groping for nurture; grave flowers over me,
Feeding upon a heart that could not beat—
Until you came—Oh then I lived at last—
I gave you what your fiery youth desired—
Fed the dear hungry flame that warmed me so—
Say that you can not hate! Say 'I love you!'

Say it again and yet again—'I love you!'
You can't forget the summer that was ours!
Oh the close air that breeds gigantic storms,
Choked with the smell of passionate crimson blooms—
Color flung riot in the storm-charged hush—
All earth-sounds dead beneath the swelter of the noon—
And then—Oh then the deluge—sweep of the storm,
Blinding as wind-lashed rain-sheets! Dizzy glooms
Stabbed with the lightning of eternal things—
And we two huddled closely! Then the hush—
The quiet, and the smell of wet, green life!
Can you forget? Oh tell me that you love me!

THE YOUTH.

I pity you, but loathe more.

SATYRA.

Pity me?
You fling the pence of pity unto me?
Did I ask pity of you?

Go to her!
Go! Go! And tell her as you bill and coo
I had no tears to shed for what she takes!
Tell her to reckon on that certain day
When her tears, even as mine, go down her throat
And drip on inner hells—a mocking rain!

And *you!* Your hells shall seize you in the nights!
When once this rosy mood has passed away,
Grown weary of her smug housewifely ways,
How you shall thirst for flagons broken now!
And you shall feel the blistering seconds crawl
Across your sleepless brain like venomous bugs,
Eating a slow trail toward the hated day.
Ten thousand leagues of desert 'twixt her sleeping
And your hot wakefulness shall surely lie;
And you shall wake her with unmanly weeping,
And you shall both hear laughter—'twill be I!
Your heartless service and your forced embraces,
The kisses that you give her, mine shall be!
Mine all the smiles, and hers the poor grimaces;
Your lies to her shall be the truth to me!

Yea, when you hate her least, without a warning
Like lightning shall the memory be hurled
Of when in white immensities of morning
Bloomed up for us the Rose of all the World!
Oh in that field, your breast, shall I be loser,
When Law and Nature clash in battle-blur?
Go to your angel! I am Victress, Chooser!
And tell her I was tearless—Go to her!

II

(*A tree-enclosed fountain. Moonrise, shortly after sunset of the following day. The Youth waiting for Gloria*)

THE YOUTH.

Oh something weird is happening in my heart!
Vast cloud-worlds, scudding through a war of winds
Drive like doomed ships on shores of mystic peace;
And darkness knifed with lightning, bleeds big rain
Out of its ragged gashes! Rain of the Soul!
And Oh, beneath I feel a world grow green!

There is a wild glad widening of things,
An outward thrust on walls of a world outgrown.
Push out, O Pillars of the Evening and the Morning!
More space! Expand, O little Universe!
Out of the husk of the beast the Man-Flower bursts!

(*Stares long at the sparkling waters, and becomes drowsed by the sound*)

You Water-Poem, how I understand you!
The force that drove you through the earthly glooms
Lifts you at last in glories heavenward!

(*Grows drowsier, nods and passes into a dream*)

Why, you are talking,
Sprite of the Fountain,

Scintillant Sister,
Girl, star-enamored!
What are you saying?
No, you are singing!
Dancing and singing,
Spinning on tiptoe,
Hair like a gossamer
Woven of moon-glow!
No! You are Gloria,
Woven of apple-bloom
White in the starlight!

(*The dream darkens and the fountain disappears*)

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Singing in the distance*)
Longings to grow and be vaster,
Sap songs under the Blue;
Hints of the Mighty Master
Making his dream come true.

Sensing the northbound Wonder
Arrows of wild geese flee;
Bursting its bonds with thunder,
The River yearns to the Sea!

THE YOUTH.
Oh hark! Is it my own soul grown a bird
That, flown from my breast, soars upward in the night,

Showering star-fires of song? Or Gloria
There by the fountain waiting?

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Continuing her song*)
Gaunt limbs, winter-scarred, tragic,
Blind seeds under the mold,
Planning new wonders of magic
In scarlet and green and gold!

THE YOUTH.
Hark again!
More fountain than the fountain's self, she showers
The rainbowed, hopeful waters of the heart!
How long to-night the way seems; I am late.

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Finishing her song*)
Oh passionate, panting, love-laden,
She is coming, she sings in the South—
The World's Bride—April the Maiden—
With a half-blown rose for a mouth!

THE YOUTH. (*Entering the tree-enclosed space about the fountain*)
Give me that half-rose mouth to kiss, my Gloria,
You April of me! Oh, I could have felt you,
Known you abroad and singing, were I deaf,
Just as a blind man without sense of smell

Might know when maples ooze in the upward surge,
Or when through the smoke-thin greenery of boughs
The scattering wildfire of the fruit-bloom runs.

Oh, Gloria, I've come so far, so far!
I come from wandering in a wilderness;
And I was there alone,
Save for the certain gew-gaw gods I made,
Whittling them eagerly, hopefully out of my heart,
Half in the hope to justify my wilderness,
Half in a yearning guess at better things
Than flesh in a wilderness,
Than mornings sprung from nothing,
Than evenings sinking nowhere!

But in the eerie twilights of the fastness,
Shadows stole out of my breast;
Hideous nothings, walking as flesh walks—
Revilers of my gods wrought in hopefulness and patience,
Revilers of me, the maker of the gods.
And then my gods were only whittled things,
And I reviled them also, and was godless.

And there was only wilderness and I;
For nowhere in that fastness could I find
A god-stuff waiting plastic for my hands.

My cries brought only echoes,
Troops of echoes, armies of prolific echoes,
Born out of hollowness and immensity,
Fecund with my searching father-cry!
And all the universe was peopled—but with echoes.
And I myself was but a wandering echo,
Born of a cry I knew not,
Fathered by some splendid distant singing!

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Singing*)
Lo, a wandering echo I,
Flung afar, confused, forlorn;
Yearning with a broken cry,
Yet of splendid music born!

Echo from a Wonder-Horn
That sends the music flying far,
Blaring through the scarlet morn,
Tinkling in the spangled star!

Where in all the songs that are
May the echo cease to be,
Filling out a wondrous bar,
Blending with a melody?

Like a ghost there lives in me,
Frustrate in my monotone,
Something chanted by a Sea,
Something out of vastness blown.

Lost, reiterant, alone,
I grow weary, seeking long,
Out of master-music blown,
Homesick for the Mother-Song.
Yet—what though the way be long?
Hark the music flying far!
Trumpets from the scarlet morn,
Lyrics from the evening star!

Kin to all the songs that are,
Of a splendid singing born,
Sun and I and Sea and Star,
Echoes from a Wonder-Horn!

THE YOUTH.

And a Vision came, walking as flesh walks,
A Vision with a woman's awful face!
And there were luring, melancholy sunsets in it,
Terrible glimpses of sea-distances,
Sultry lightnings, lifting the curtains of strange worlds,
Unattainable worlds that saddened me;
And mystic ocean-voices lived about it.
And I was homesick for I knew not what,
And my heart drooped with longing.

And then a singing seized me,
A giddy whirlwind of singing:
Woven of all the melancholy sunsets,
The sad sea-distances,

The sullen lightning of unattainable things,
Weird worlds uncurtained briefly:
Oh come with me and through my gardens run,
And we shall pluck strange flowers that love the sun,
Of which the sap is blood, the petals flame,
The sweet, forbidden blossoms of no name!
Oh splendid is my garden walled with Night,
Dim-torched with stars and secret for delight:
And winds breathe there the lure of smitten strings,
Vocal of the immensity of things!
Oh, Wailer out of nothing, nowhere hurled,
Frustrate the bitter purpose of the World!
Thou shalt drink deep of all delights that be—
Oh come with me!

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Singing*)
I have a secret garden
Where sacred lilies lift
White faces kind with pardon
To hear my shrift.

And all blood-riot falters
Before those faces there;
Bowed down at quiet altars,
Mine hours are monks at prayer.

Oh through my spirit kneeling,
The Silence thrills and sings

The cosmic brother feeling
Of growing, hopeful things;

Old soothing Earth a mother,
A sire the stooping Blue;
The Sun a mighty Brother—
And God is in the dew.

Oh, Garden hushed, and splendid
With lily, star and tree!
There all wild dreams are ended—
Oh come with me!

THE YOUTH.

And oh the face was the song visible
Of sweet, forbidden, much-desired things.
My soul rushed to my lips and thirsted for it!
The taste was bitter-sweet,
And drinking was a madness dearer than sanity.
Long, long I clung a drunkard at that face,
While my soul was a dream discredited,—
Eternity a swoon!

And then, as a mist rent by the stroke of a Wind's wing,
Rifts yawned in the face,
Chasms of dizzy depth!
And out of them a stormy vision blew—
A wind of things that have been and shall be:

Proud towers crumbling in a swirl of hungry smoke;
Whirlwinds of futile war;
Shield-piercings, sword-lightnings;
War-steeds neighing terrified 'mid spears;
Flameful kisses flinging conflagration;
Drinkers of a red wine of defeat;
Munchers of broken flagons;
Sinister Helen and her sisterhood,
Fair woman-tigress faces burning through the swooping gloom,
Sicklied over with a meteoric glare!

And darkness fell upon the face.
And I was alone.
The flame within me flickered thin and blue,
Loathsome as a charred wick in the grease,
And closer crept the strangling convolutions of the dark.
And there was silence in the wilderness;
And I was huddled in it.
But lo! A Voice cried!

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Singing*)
Hark, the music calling!
From the earth it grows,
From the sky 'tis falling,
In the wind it blows!

Silver-noted star-gleams
Through the moony glooms;
Golden-noted sunbeams
Wooing cherry blooms!

Flying-fingered Winds smite
Throbbing strings of rain;
Through the misty midnight
Moans the Growing Pain!

Cradle-buds are shaken
By a hand they know:
Brother, Sister, waken—
'Tis the time to grow!

THE YOUTH.

A Voice awful in the quiet!
As a deluge from the heavens it fell,
As a breath from the earth it arose—
A wild, compelling music;
Like the swift fingers of the Wind upon the harp-strings of the Rain;
Blind, groping, toiling roots, singing of predestined blossoms;
Dying flowers chanting the glory of seed;
A sad, wise rune of growing,
Mysterious as birth,
Mystic as death;
Thin treble threads spun silverly out of Immensity;
Murmurous thunders, sullen with menace!

And all about me a subtle Influence gathered,
A something motherly, cuddling me.
And I was a bud enfolded in sunlight,
A seed in a rain-warmed soil.
As a bud to the sun I responded,
As a seed in the damp, I expanded.
And a rustling of grasses went through me,
A shuddering murmur of wind-dimpled wheat-fields.
And I knew this compassing, motherly, fatherly something
The thing I had groped for, striving to fashion and see it,
God of the trees and the grasses and men—
The tender, formless, vast, unwhittled God!

And the Earth was a cradle rocked,
And I was an infant awakened,
Dazzled with star-mist and moon-shine.
When lo! a face leaned o'er me, smiling down,
Mothering me with gentle woman-eyes,
And in my cradle's purple canopy
Builded a shielding heaven!

Gloria,
My sky is in your face, and all my dawns
Flush there, and all my evenings hallow it;
And it is awful with the drift of stars,
And mystic with the wandering of moons!
Rain, rain upon me kisses, O my Sky!

Am I a dreamer? As a seed I dream;
And all my blood is filled with prophecy,
Awed whisperings of wonders imminent.

THE DREAM-GLORIA. (*Singing*)
They call me dreamer since my vow
Was given unto you;
But Oh, the fields are greener now,
And Oh, the skies are blue!

What song the quiet night-glooms hold,
How big the new stars burn!
And Oh, the dawns are showers of gold
From out a purple urn!

(*The Dream-Gloria is transformed into a fountain*)

THE YOUTH.
Why, you are not my Gloria after all,
But just a joyous yearning up of waters,
Born of the Earth but fathered by a Cloud,
My pure sky-loving Sister, fleshed with mist!

THE FOUNTAIN. (*Singing*)
I am the sprite of the fountain,
Sprung from the gloom am I,
Out of the womb of the Mountain,
Big with the kiss of the Sky!
I am the Fugitive Glory,
Singing the strong soul's story.

Twinkling, tinkling, glad to be
Out of the prison of Earth set free;
Dancing, mad with the cosmic tune,
Laughing under the stars and moon—
Back to the Ocean soon!

Back to the Sky and back to the Sea—
Oh I was a prisoner long!
But the love of the Vast was strong in me,
I fed on the Dream of the Strong.
And Oh while the slow gloom chained the Deed,
I wrought my vision of silvery speed!
And out of the dread hush round about,
I fashioned a gladsome victor-shout!
Sister of Wave and Cloud am I,
And the world grows green as I pass by—
Back to the Sea and Sky!

III

(*The Same. Satyra enters and stabs the Youth*)

THE YOUTH. (*Awakening, dazed*)
The lightning!—Oh!—It pierced me—forkèd hell-knives!—
Out of a spring-sky! Gloria!—Where is Gloria?

SATYRA. (*Leaning over him*)
I am the Lightning!

THE YOUTH.

You?—You?—

SATYRA.

Kiss, Oh, kiss me!
I struck because I love you—Quick! One kiss!
The curtain falls between us! Oh, one kiss
Can wipe out all the sting of this bad dream—
And I shall follow, follow after you,
Through all the forlorn endlessness of gloom,
The nightmare moanings of the frustrate dead!
One kiss, and I shall follow like a dog,
Snarl back defiance at the sneer of God,
Guard you and love you! Quick! The frail thread snaps,
And we are lost forever—Quick, Oh quick—
The whirlwind arms of Death are parting us!
Is Death a woman? God! Is Death a—

THE YOUTH. (*With eyes brightening*)

Hark!
She comes! She sings! 'Tis Gloria! Go away!

GLORIA. (*Singing in the distance, drawing closer to the trysting place*)

Oh seek me not within a tomb;
Thou shalt not find me in the clay!
I pierce a little wall of gloom
To mingle with the Day!

I brothered with the things that pass,
Poor giddy Joy and puckered Grief;
I go to brother with the Grass
And with the sunning Leaf,
The happy, sunning Leaf.

THE YOUTH.
It is the song I loved—Oh go away!

GLORIA. (*Nearing the fountain*)
Not Death can sheathe me in a shroud;
A joy-sword whetted keen with pain,
I join the armies of the Cloud,
The Lightning and the Rain.

(*Satyra steals away*)

Oh subtle in the sap athrill,
Athletic in the glad uplift,
A portion of the Cosmic Will,
I pierce the planet-drift.

My God and I shall interknit
As rain and Ocean, breath and Air;
And Oh, the luring thought of it
Is prayer;
And Oh, the luring thought of it—

(*Gloria enters. The song breaks*)

XXVII

THE PASSING OF THE LION

I

(Within the Athenian castle of Alcibiades: Timandra lying on a couch, robed in flowing purple. Enter Alcibiades in armor)

ALCIBIADES.

I must be gone, Timandra, tho' my heart
Remains there on thy couch against thy breast.
An old Hebraic legend that I heard
From story-tellers at King Cyrus' court
Grows strong upon me: I have told it thee:
I am the Samson of that tale I heard,
And thou, Delilah, hast undone my strength.
My heart aches that my lips should shape the words,
Small words embittered with the gall of truth.

This purple ease, these days of sweet forgetting,
These nights of scarlet flame, these ashen dawns,
Washed bright again with damning vintages!
They have subdued the genius that was mine.
Oh, I have wakened in the hush of night
When thou hast slept, and naught but silence made

Dull murmur; when the drowsing lamps dreamed
blue;
And I have seen ghosts walking in the shadows!

Ghosts! *Ghosts!* Timandra; sere, lean, mocking
ghosts
That travestied in horrid fleshlessness
The thing I was! And I have hid my face
In arms grown womanish, that once could fling
The whips of lightning over serried ranks!
And I, the Lion, wept, wept—*wept,* Timandra!
But thou didst never know what made me break
Thy slumbers and the silence, crying "Wine!
Let us have wine and bid the harper come!"
It was the ghosts; they fled from wine and song.

TIMANDRA. (*Arising half way from her couch, extending her arms to Alcibiades*)
Yes, yes, my Lion, talk, so thou but stay!
I love to hear thee talk; O golden tongue!
O burning lips that tip thy words with flame!
Talk on, so thou but stay; talk on, talk on!
I care not if thy words be words of hate;
I care not if thy words be words of scorn.
Insult me! Curse me! Scorch my heart with fire;
The soft fire of thy lips, and I will smile!

ALCIBIADES.
Much have I talked, Timandra, now I act.

TIMANDRA.

Ah yes, the act of kissing! Take my lips!
Are they not red for thee, for thee alone?
Have they grown less the lips of woman now
Than when they kissed away the hate of men
And thy Sicilian shame?

ALCIBIADES.

Talk not of shame;
Thou who hast been a partner in my shame!
Of glory rather, and of duty too,
Then shall I be more worthy being loved.

TIMANDRA. (*Laughing*)

And dost thou grow devout? O wondrous change!
Yet only yesternight thine eyes looked dim
And rheumy with much wine into mine eyes!
And only yesternight thy talk ran on
As babbling and as senseless as a brook's!
And only yesternight didst swoon to sleep,
To snore upon this breast which now is spurned!
The Hog's snore, not the Lion's. Grown devout?
More food for Momus' laughter! Ah, ha, ha!
How wonderful is man! I still can hear
Thy foolish blubbering voice that knew no words
But "love, love, love"! Divinely drunken lisp!
Be so again! I like thee better so.

ALCIBIADES. (*Angrily*)

Timandra!

TIMANDRA.

Ah, not so thy speech last night!
It is the Lion's now; last night—the hog's!
O grunting, blubbering, snoring, *godlike* Hog!

ALCIBIADES.

Lewd prattle of the streets! Come, be thyself!
Be just once more the gentle thing I sought
To be the comfort of my wounded pride,
My sullied honor. Come—before I go.

TIMANDRA. (*Weeping, and burying her face in the pillows of her couch*)

I am half mad! Oh kiss me wholly so,
That I may quite forget! I burn! I freeze!

ALCIBIADES. (*Slowly and in a low voice*)

These tears I kiss away are wine to me
And I am drunk again! O clinging arms!
Lips soft and wet and warm, I hate thee! love thee!
Curse thee and bless thee! Thou hast made me hog,
Who should be lion in the ways of men.
O sweet undoing, pleasant degradation!

(*The shouting of the impatient multitude is heard outside; Alcibiades leaps to his feet and goes to a window, looking upon the sea where his galleys lie. He muses*)

The quiet sapphire sea! The falling sun
Makes me a long alluring path of gold,
The way to glory and the way to power.
The great sails puff and belly in the wind,
Impatient for my coming. Hear the songs
Of seamen, proud to sail with me to war;
Me, the Athenian Lion! Yea, a lion
Crouching and purring like a petted cat
About a woman's feet!

Yet—who is he,
This name—Lysander—I should conquer him?
Were it not best to rule this realm of love,
This realm of eyes and lips and breast and arms,
That feels my slightest wish and does my will?
Am I less royal now, wrapped in these arms,
Than mantled in the purple rag of power,
That fades and brings no peace?

And Oh, my Foe!
Sweeter it were that thou shouldst leave thy ships
Rotting with idle oars upon the seas,
The prey of tempests and the sharp-toothed wave,
And take thee to some little summer isle,
Just large enough for love and peace and thee!

TIMANDRA.

Is it thy voice I hear, so soft, so sweet,
So lute-like, as it was in other days?
Thou wert so loving then! A lion thou,

Conscious of all thy sinewy, nervous strength,
Yet purring for me, knowing me so weak!
Thy path of gold leads whither? Into night!

Thy galley's purple sails that tug and fret
About the masts, yearn only unto death;
And it is pleasant here.
If thou but stay,
I will be every woman in the world!
I will be Beauty, Power, Glory, Praise!
I will not sleep, that I may conjure up
New ways to love thee. I will make a lute
Out of thy lion nerves, and play thereon
Tunes sweeter than the tunes of Orpheus!
Tunes softer than the sighing of the wind!
Tunes deeper than the tones of summer seas!
Tunes mightier than the sullen shout of War!

ALCIBIADES.
O, red-lipped, soft-eyed siren, speak not so,
Or thou shalt make a weeping boy of me.
See! where the full sails catch the evening sun
And glint with gold against the purple tide!

So Duty strives to lure me; I must go.

TIMANDRA.
The gold will fade.

ALCIBIADES.

But Duty will not pass.

TIMANDRA.

The purple sea is not warm-lipped as I.

(*The shouting of the multitude is heard again*)

ALCIBIADES.

Again they shout! My people waiting me!
My people trusting in me in their need!
I shall not kiss you more, for I must go.
Farewell.

TIMANDRA.

O small word, big in gloom!
How shall it be with me when thou art gone?
See! Look again; I am not weeping now!
I am dry-eyed; tears make me hideous.
Look! Look! I will not weep; see, I can smile!

ALCIBIADES.

Oh, thou art Helen!

TIMANDRA.

Nay, not haughty Helen,
That curse of men and kings! Her flawless face
Flings through the weird terrific gloom of Time
A baleful glare of murder!

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(*Falls at the feet of Alcibiades, laying her face against his sandalled feet*)

Look again!
I will be wanton for thee, shameless! Come!
Make me a rag to wipe thy feet upon!
No feet shall be so warmed, caressed as thine.
Come, tramp upon me, crush me! Scorn! Insult!
Make me the most despised of womankind!
Make me a household word of infamy!
No, no, thou couldst not do so; be my god,
And I shall grovel weakly at thy feet.
I shall be Danaë, thou the shower of gold!
My love shall make my lips as sweet as wine!
My very life shall be a song for thee,
And when I die, my love shall find a way
To blossom upward for thee from the dust!

(*The multitude shouts "Alcibiades"*)

ALCIBIADES.

Hear! 'Tis the voice of Glory and of Duty!
My people call! I go! One kiss! Farewell!

And yet, Timandra, were my love the judge
Between me and my going—I would stay.
It is not so. This giddy people's scorn,
Grown praise, because they need me, still is scorn.
I smile, but feel the canker at my heart.
I go to sweep the seas of Athens' foes,

Only that I may punish Athens' scorn.
I shall come back a hundred times myself
And flaunt before these giddy children's eyes
The deep-dyed, inborn purple of my soul!
I shall walk o'er them prostrate! They shall blink
With staring as upon the noonday sun!
And thou shalt share my brilliance, sweet Timandra.
Thy dainty feet shall press the necks of kings,
Grown slaves to be a carpet for thy feet!
Where'er thy tapered jewelled fingers point
Athenian blades shall write thy name in lightnings!

(*Hurries to the door, where he stops and looks back hesitatingly*)

Farewell.
(*He goes out*)

TIMANDRA.

O People, People! How I hate thee!
Thou wriggling, howling, sweating, struggling mass!

(*Arises*)

But now no more of mewing like a kitten!

(*Goes to the window and sees Alcibiades proceed-*

ing through the crowd, that makes way for him, bowing low as he passes)

Go forth, my Lion, O my noble Lion!
Seek out thy prey, and I shall help thee tear it,
Rend it with fangs that shall grow sharp and cruel
In the long famine of thy absence. Go!
Thou art a lion—I, a lioness.

(*Leans against the window looking out upon the multitude surging about Alcibiades, as he proceeds toward the galleys*)

It may be I shall never see thee more.
Thou goest, why, I do not understand.
I am half jealous of this Praise of Men,
This Power that thou wooest. Were I these,
Then wouldst thou never need go forth as now.
I should not ask for stroke of steel or clash
Of meeting shields, or games of chance with death.
It were enough to me that thou wert near
To breathe enchantment o'er me.

Ah, he goes!
The oars dip gaily, rippling into gold
The purple waters as 'twere holiday.

(*Gazes long upon the scene*)

He leaves the boat! He treads the deck! They
shout!
The purple sails veer round and take the breeze!
The black hulks tremble, swing about and toss
Impatiently the waters!

(*Watches until the sails have dwindled into specks upon the rim of sea*)

Ah—they fade!
They fade—and now—are gone! One gleam of
gold
Upon a restless sail, then empty sea,
The lonesome sky, the lonesome sea, the empty
world!

II

(*In a house in Phrygia, to which Alcibiades has fled after his fleet has been ignominiously defeated by Lysander. Alcibiades sits at a table with his head buried in his arms. Timandra enters quietly, having come to the defeated admiral from Athens. She touches him upon the shoulder; he does not move*)

TIMANDRA. (*Timidly*)
I've come.

ALCIBIADES. (*Sullenly*)
Thou hast.

TIMANDRA.

The way was long and hard,
But pity for thee made it short and easy.

ALCIBIADES. (*Leaping up in a rage, and drawing his sword from its sheath*)
Pity! *Pity! Who dares to breathe that word!*
Who ventures pity for a fallen god?
Thou? Silly creature of an idle whim,
Begone! Or I shall—

(*Groans, drops his sword and staggers to his seat, dropping his head upon his arms*)

TIMANDRA. (*Softly*)

Alcibiades,
'Tis not the god I pity—'tis the man.
That which was kind to me, not that which held
The world in breathless awe. Forgive me, dear.
If I have wounded where I meant to heal.

ALCIBIADES. (*In a subdued voice*)
Ah I am fallen indeed; for I have raised
A conquered sword against an armless woman!
I can not lift my head again, Timandra,
To look upon thy face. If thou wouldst see
A boaster biting dust, look thou on me—
Thus come I back a hundred times myself!
I shudder now to speak the words; they seem

The laughter of the inauspicious gods.
I bragged to come in purple, and I lie
Before thee, ragged, wretched, least of men!
Strike me and go! Take up my sword and strike
And go and shout it to the laughing world
"A woman now can beard the fallen Lion!"

TIMANDRA.

All that I loved in thee thou hast brought back.
In my small world, still art thou purple-clad.
Be kind to me, my Lion. Come, look up!
Thou shalt not find derision in mine eyes.
I bring no news to cheer thee; I have none.
I can not say "Thy galleys ride the seas
Victorious." My simple woman wit
Can shape no plans for winning back the world.
All that I have I bring to thee—myself;
'Tis wretched little; yet if aught there be
In this of peace or comfort, it is thine.
I love thee more that thou art fallen now.
To me, it is my rival that hath lost,
My rival, that strange Titan-woman, Power!
How I did hate her, Alcibiades!
I was not all the harlot that I seemed
In those old days of revel. Oft I dreamed
How sweet 'twould be if thou wert not so great
That I might hope to be—forgive—thy wife!
And often in my sleep I held thy child
And nursed it, Oh, with such deep happiness,

Only to waken harlot! I have wept
Often at such times, choking with the scent
Of wines and perfumes, meaning what they did.
But when thine eyes would open, I would smile
And laugh and sing the harlot back again,
Because it was thy wish.

Look up and smile!
Look up and see that woman in mine eyes
That all these years I have kept drowned in wine!
One little province yet remains to thee;
Lysander could not sweep it from thy grasp!
'Tis I—and yet I fear to offer it
So kingly art thou even in thy fall.

ALCIBIADES. (*Raising his head and staring dazedly at Timandra; speaking hesitatingly*)
Have I drunk wine? Or is it but thy voice
That brings back all the glory of old times?
Slowly I feel it creeping in—the sense
Of pride and power like a tranquil sea
Come back in tide upon the thirsty sand.
Speak on, for I would feel once more the king
Before I let the beggar in my blood.

TIMANDRA.
I would my voice were wine, that I might speak
Forgetfulness of all that thou hast felt.
For now at last I see thee face to face.

Of old thou wert so high, I could not reach
Above thy feet where I, the harlot, grovelled;
And my weak voice could never hope to climb
The soaring, steep Olympus to thy heart.
Oh be a man, and let the gods be gods;
They see too far for peace, too far for peace!

ALCIBIADES. (*Excitedly*)
Hist! Hist! It is the voice of vanished days
Arisen from the dust, and filling night
With ghostly trumpet blasts! Hark! Hark!
Timandra,
It is the shrill glad swords at Delium!
Dost thou not hear them—hear the singing swords?
The blare of haughty trumpets? I am young!
The battle deepens round me! I can see
The silvered circling of the merry blades!
Again I see him, Socrates my friend,
Pushed hard with angry steel! He falls! He falls!
And I am there again amid the storm
Of men and blades, the roaring waves of men,
Whitening above with brandished steel, like surf!
I feel again my great forefather's blood,
The blood of Ajax boiling in my veins!
I strike! I thrust! I parry! Gods! They sway,
They waver, cower, flee! I stand alone
Above the unhurt body of my friend
And laugh, laugh, laugh!
(*Wearily*) And this was I, Timandra.

Old days, old days, Timandra, how they sting!
And it was I who dreamed to spread my realm
Wherever barley, vines and olives grew!
And it was I who—

Now I am a beggar.

TIMANDRA. (*Stroking the long locks of Alcibiades*)
Ah, beggar sayest thou? Then beggar me,
Kind gods! I shall be prouder in such rags
Than ever in Milesian purple robes!

Let us forget it all, my Lion: come!
Let us believe it all some troubled dream
To be kissed out in waking! Kiss me now
And let me hold thee in mine arms again
As in old times, but with a purer heart.

Ah—so! Is it not sweet? Is it not sweet?

ALCIBIADES.
So! Hold me so; thy arm about my neck,
Thy breath upon my cheek, my realmless eyes
Deep-shadowed with thy hair. I shall forget.
Of old I held thee lightly as a cup
More exquisitely wrought than most—no more—
From which I quaffed a pleasant wine, and yawned
Thinking that I had drained it to the dregs.
And yet, till now I had but touched the brim;
I had not known the sweet of woman-wine!

Each thought I gave thee wronged thee in those days.
Forgive me: I, the Lion, ask forgiveness.
'Twas never done before. To-night I see
The first that I have seen, for I was blind
With gazing upon scarlet, purple, gold.

To-night I have uncovered all my weakness,
And thou hast seen me grovel; thou alone
Of all the world hast seen me grovel so.

A calmness I have never known before
Hath grown within me here upon thy breast.
Methinks it would be sweet to go with thee
To some lone mountain fastness, there to watch
The evening of a noisy day grow dim
And sink into a quiet gloom of age.

TIMANDRA.
Oh, sweet disaster that hath brought me this!

ALCIBIADES.
And we shall have a hut like simple folk,
And we shall learn how sweet it is to watch
The vines and olives grow through sunny days.
And we shall learn what makes the shepherds sing
Soft airs of sweet content unto their flocks;
For now, methinks, some secret dwells therein
That could shake bigot thrones, if learned aright.

I was the centre of a noisy world,
A world of hatreds, jealousies, revenge,
A flattering, fawning world, a treacherous world;
And now I wish to lay my hands on Peace
And touch the finger-tips of Happiness.
I shall give up my sword to dust and rust;
And thou shalt teach me to forget—forget
All save that simpleness alone is sweet.

I see that thou art glad; kiss me again
That new soft kiss that burns not as of old.

To-morrow this shall be; now let us sleep.

III

(*Alcibiades and Timandra upon a couch. The lamps burn low. Alcibiades raises himself upon one arm and groans, staring dazedly about the room*)

ALCIBIADES.
Oh! Oh! O gods!

TIMANDRA. (*Arising*)
What troubles thee, my own?

ALCIBIADES.
O gods! Make lights! It is so dark, so dark!

TIMANDRA.
Hast dreamed, my own? See, I am here with thee;
I kiss thee, stroke thy hair; dost thou not know?

ALCIBIADES. (*Panting*)
Yes, thou art here—and yet—I feel alone.
Make lights, Timandra! Flood the room with light!
Let not one shadow linger! I am sick,
And yet I have no pain. Did I cry out?

TIMANDRA.
Like one who feels a dagger in his breast—
A shivering cry!

ALCIBIADES.
It was a dream, I know;
And yet—it hath not fled along with sleep.

TIMANDRA.
Come, calm thyself; disaster hath unnerved thee;
Lie still and sleep, for I shall wake and watch.

ALCIBIADES.
Ah, rather would I face a sea of swords
Than sleep again! I am afraid to sleep:
I have no sword with which to meet a dream.

I dreamed that I lay here upon this couch
And saw my haters coming: Agis came
Dark-browed with malice, and Lysander too
With grim derision playing on his lips;
And Pharnabazus; after these there came

In dizzy riot, faces that had smiled
In those dead times when I was still the Lion,
But now they leered upon me in my fall.

And when I would have drawn my sword, I found
No steel within the scabbard, but instead,
Only a wooden distaff soft with wool
With which I thrust: and all the faces laughed.
And when I would have risen, through my limbs
A languor spread and held me impotent.

Slowly the jumbled faces whirled about
In dizzy circles, closing in upon me;
And then they stopped and stared, whilst one
came forth,
Agis, and dressed me in a woman's robes
And smeared the harlot's paint upon my cheeks,
And travestied the lover's honied words;
Whereat I groaned, and all the faces laughed
In shrill, derisive chorus!

Then I felt
The fingers of the king upon my throat,
And felt that I was dying like a slave
Whose blood were too ignoble for a sword.
And then I cried aloud and woke. I seem
Indeed a woman, frightened at so little:
And yet—and yet, Timandra—

Do the lights
Burn brightly as they should? Hold thou my hand.
Thou knowest I would fight real men with swords:
But shadows—*shadows! things that have not blood!*
I know 'tis nothing—yet I wish 'twere day.

IV

(*Without the house. Emissaries of Alcibiades' enemies have set fire to the building. Alcibiades rushes forth, followed by Timandra, who clings to him. Both are dressed in their night robes. With his naked sword in his right hand, and his mantle wrapped about his left arm for a shield, Alcibiades advances into the space of light, peering into the encircling darkness*)

TIMANDRA. (*Weeping*)
Oh, go not there, my own! Can we not flee?
Come back! Come back! They lie in wait to kill thee!

ALCIBIADES. (*Advancing and peering into the night ahead*)
Be still! Let go my robe!

TIMANDRA.
Oh, they will kill thee!
Come back for my sake; let us turn and flee!

ALCIBIADES. (*Quietly*)
I have a mood for killing dogs to-night.
Hast ever heard the singing of a sword?
Be still and listen; 'tis a pleasing song.

VOICES FROM THE NIGHT.
Woman! Traitor! Woman! Woman!

ALCIBIADES. (*Whispering*)
Hear!
It is a portion of my dream come true.
I have a sword to meet my dreams awake!
And thou shall see me fling the lie to-night
Unto the bitter balance of this dream!

(*Runs his fingers up and down the edge of his blade. Musingly to his sword*)

Thou are not quite a distaff yet, my friend,
And mine is not a woman's arm to-night.
Old times, old times, my Sword! Thou art the last
Of all my warring friends, and thou art true.
Thou hast carved realms ere now, and thou hast been
As whips of lightning in the clouds of war.
To-night, leap out the last, and bring me peace!

(*Crying into the night to his invisible foes*)

Come forth into the light! See, I am here!
Come forth, come all; I care not if thou art
A handful or a phalanx! I have met
Some better men than those who prey at night
Like jackals! Come within the space of light,
And I shall send thee to these better men!

(*A dart whirs out of the darkness and buries itself in his leg*)

TIMANDRA.

O gods! Come! Flee! They will not meet thee fair;
They mean to kill thee like a hunted boar,
And thou art wounded! Would I were a man,
A hundred men, to follow thee, my Lion!

(*Throws herself in front of Alcibiades, crying to the invisible foes*)

Once more and higher! Wouldst thou kill, kill me!
I shall not care! I beg thee, shoot again!
If thou hast mothers, sisters, wives who love,
Do this for them!

ALCIBIADES. (*Pushing her aside gently, and speaking quietly*)

Draw forth the dart, Timandra,
That I may move the better. 'Tis the thrust
Of some weak coward: I touch naught but swords.

(*Speaking into the darkness*)

Perhaps thy harness is not buckled well,
And so detains thee; and thou sendest this
To cheer the time of waiting. Thou art kind.

(*Other darts fly out of the night, one lodging in his left shoulder. Rushes forth without removing the dart to the edge of the darkness; thrusts at moving shadows with his sword. Timandra falls, wailing, upon the ground*)

Dogs! Cowards! Jackals! Wouldst not face the woman?

(*A handful of darts lodge in his naked breast. He totters, falls, supporting himself upon one arm. Speaks gaspingly*)

Oh, such a lion's death! No foe to face!
Gods! gods! Be kind and give one drop of blood
To tip my sword of many goodly fights;
Oh, let me give it honor ere I go!
I would that I might sheathe it in hot bowels,
And let it hear once more a noble groan:
Before I die, kind gods, before I die!

(*Sinks down upon his side with a sigh. There is the sound of men running away in the darkness.*

Timandra runs to Alcibiades and throwing herself beside his body, draws a dart from his breast)

ALCIBIADES. (*In a faint choked voice*)
No—no—a dog's death—think of me—Timandra—
Forget—remember—Oh, the—little—hut—
A dog's death—kiss—me—

TIMANDRA. (*Weeping and kissing his face*)
O my noble Lion!
Let me draw forth the darts and stanch the blood,
And I shall nurse thee, Oh, so tenderly!
Speak, speak; dost thou forget the golden days
Of quietness we planned? How we shall watch
The vines and olives grow, and hear the notes
Of shepherds singing? Speak!
Hast thou—*forgot*?

(*Buries her face among the darts upon the breast of Alcibiades. The flames burn low, and the circle of shadow creeps over them. As the light dies, the sobbing of Timandra is heard in the darkness*)

EXTRACTS FROM APPRECIATIONS OF "A BUNDLE OF MYRRH."

Published by Mitchell Kennerley, $1.00 *net.*

"The book is a sequence of short poems and chants, filled with the exuberant joy of being alive, the desire for better things, and a look beyond the flesh."—Atlanta *Georgian and News.*

"The author builds from one emotion to another, until he has covered the natural passions of a man.—A delight and a revelation to the reader."—Louisville (Ky.) *Times.*

"John G. Neihardt, a young Western writer of fiction, now comes with 'A Bundle of Myrrh,' as a poet; and a poet he certainly is. He writes in the way of the true creators; not for the sake of mere writing, but because something had to come out. It is as though Mr. Neihardt had been born to write poetry, and had succeeded fully in doing it, in spite of obstacles in himself and in his environment, that would seem insurmountable. He is a child of the West, far away from the schools, the academic traditions, and the centers of thought; and he has the qualities that we think of when we think of the West. He knows how to blaze his own trail, and for his purposes he does not need to macadamize the way as he goes. He is self-reliant, he knows the sting of the blizzards, the loneliness of the prairie, the exhilaration and the bitterness of life close to nature. The volume opens with the boy, out of doors and whistling. He does not know very much of anything, nor believe in anything beyond himself

and the facts of eternal nature. Love comes to him, and he is swept off his feet by passion, but in the very midst of the passion he feels its transitoriness, and both the man and the artist in him rise to something higher than the type of love he has known. The sequence ends on a rising note, when he is led to understand the beauty of womanhood, and through this, the higher spiritual side of life. The last poem makes a superb climax. It is well formed, noble in expression and of compelling power. The story has been told over and over, but here it is told in a new way. There is something added from the writer's own personality. There is a vital power in these poems. They are distinctly human fragments of life."—Albany *Argus.*

"John G. Neihardt, in 'A Bundle of Myrrh,' offers a stirring sequence of songs and chants, that must attract the serious pleased attention of all lovers of fervent poetry, picturesque imagery and freshness of spirit. The characteristic lines of the rushing, unbridled prelude, stir the reader as might a vigorous sea breeze. His great emotions flaming out in such poems as 'Across the Sea of Centuries,' 'The Temple of the Great Outdoors,' and the vivid, passionate, appealing 'Prayer of an Alien Soul,' which last is a notable poetic achievement, sends a thrill through the sympathetic reader, whose beauty-pulse also leaps to picture-phrases such as 'My love is like a visual shout of red,' or 'Robed in the vast and lonesome purple spaces.' Away with cold criticism of that upon which the divinest muse has at last laid an approving finger! It is not often that a seasoned reviewer can read a book of poems straight through from cover to cover and cry aloud for more!"—Chicago *Record-Herald.*

"There is a haunting sense of the free rhythms of Pindar, and the grand movement of Heine's North Sea poems in many of the beautiful passion poems of this collection."—Dr. Glen Levin Swiggett in *Pathfinder.*

"John G. Neihardt is a young poet of most excellent promise. His 'A Bundle of Myrrh' contains verses which are far above the average of American poetic production of the present time. It is hard to tell in which vein one likes him best. His free form verse undoubtedly carries him to the highest imaginative level that he has attained, but his rhymed lyrics not only ring agreeably in the ear, but breathe deep feeling and poignant aspiration. His poem, 'Let Down your Hair' is more lyrical than Kipling's 'Vampire,' and expresses something of the same idea much more delicately. Mr. Neihardt employs as a dedication his poem beginning 'When I, the Fool, am Dead,' which certainly aroused and deserved a great deal of admiration when it was published in a magazine. At times he recalls Whitman, yet not in the sense of imitation. Indeed, Mr. Neihardt seems to us to be the first man to employ the Whitman idea with originality and success since the Master fell silent at Camden."—New York *Evening Mail.*

"Hail to a new poet! John G. Neihardt's first book of verse, 'A Bundle of Myrrh,' is one of the poetic events of the year, notable alike for promise and achievement."—*Current Literature.*

"The first impression made by Mr. Neihardt's work is one of striking originality in both its substance and its form. The emotion that sets it aglow is authentic; and, at moments, has a primitive force and simplicity. It is spontaneous and full of fire,

perfectly genuine, natural and sincere; comes direct from the heart and goes to the heart. Every line tingles with the electric fluid of the poet's own personality, and in all the poems stirs the spirit of the West. Freedom, boldness, vigor, buoyant hopefulness, contempt for convention, disregard of venerable tradition, and defiant self-confidence, are the characteristics of this verse. Mr. Neihardt is never a mere virtuoso, rendering other's music and echoing other's feelings. His diction, too, has a wonderful felicity, freshness, poignancy and vitality. The words seem to have their own life, and are richly freighted with the poet's own individual message."—Horatio Sheafe Krans in *Book News Monthly.*

"A Bundle of Myrrh is a lyric sequence. Mr. Neihardt builds from one emotion to another, until he has told the story of a man's natural passions. Through devious paths we are led. At times he almost makes us disdain ourselves as men. Strong and telling pictures are unfolded. And finally we come face to face with the most uplifting fancies. We are reminded of great symphonies, of overwhelming chords, harmonies and melodies, all bursting forth in a rapturous acclaim for the 'hand that rocks the cradle.' And as the last aria lingers on the appealing instrument at Mr. Neihardt's command, we close with a verse resonant and spiritual, noble and manly —peace instilling."—Pittsburg *Despatch.*

"Modern poetry has been charged with a vacuous play on words, a sort of two-step done in meter. No one can accuse Mr. Neihardt of this. His theme is a big one—the same big theme that has occupied poets from the beginning, love and its tragedies played out in terms of the human. You are distinctly conscious of something in Mr. Neihardt's work besides the ob-

servance of schoolish rules. You are conscious in every line of great passion and beauty, as well as the technique that is good because it is unconscious of itself."—Agnes C. Laut in N. Y. *Times Sat. Review.*

"To hail the coming of a new poet is one of the dangers that critics avoid whenever possible. Occassionally, however, there arises a writer of such power that tribute must be paid at once to his genius. Of such stuff is one John G. Neihardt, who comes out of Nebraska with a book of poems of such merit. That this poet has come out of the West is no mere coincidence; for it is to the West that America inevitably has to look for its great poetic and dramatic force. With the freedom of the breadth and the sweep of the ranges, and the inspiration of the mountains and the plains, comes the true spirit of poetic power, untainted by the superficiality of the cities. In form and feeling, this poet is strikingly original. He has spontaneity and sincerity and personality. The freedom, the hopefulness, the buoyancy, the magnificent self-confidence, the strength, the courage of the Great West, ring through the poems. On the whole it is a book of poems of so much more than merely average merit, that Mr. Neihardt has achieved by it a place in American literature that might well be coveted by men who have labored long in the vineyard."—Chicago *Journal.*

"Mr. Neihardt is a young man whose stories of the West have recently attracted much attention on both sides of the Atlantic. He treats the immemorial lyrical themes which are as old as the breath of the first singer, but he adds to them something new—his own youth and the freshness of his own thought. Throughout the whole book there is scarcely a trace of mere writing; the lyrics are moments of life caught

in the passing, and they ring true, bearing the stamp of a genuine creative impulse, and leaving behind them in the memory a conviction of absolute sincerity."—Louis V. Ledoux in Brooklyn *Eagle.*

"I only speak for one, but there has seemed to me a bigness about the singing of this man, a fine unconscious Western courage, and vision. The lines he has written are always striking one with that combined sense of surprise and of inevitableness which belongs with the man who is not a mere artist, but who has managed at the same time while becoming an artist to keep on being a genius besides."—Gerald Stanley Lee in *Mount Tom.*

"Of course I had read many of the poems in reviews and magazines, and knew how strong and new they were—but not until I saw them in their entirety did I realize *just* how strong and new a note had come into modern poetry. In all truth, they take my breath away with their freshness and vitality, their direct expression of life. Life is the one thing that most of our recent poets are afraid of, and it is the very reason so little work now is outlasting its day, or even making a day for itself. For instance, take Alfred Noyes, with his beautiful technique, but nothing to prove that he has ever felt or suffered or lived; Cawein and Carman with their wonderful nature work, but so little of the human side, and many others who have genuine art but so little direct interpreation of life.

"*You* have life and the spiritual sense of it, and the imaginative beauty of it, and a wholly virile and individual art through which to express it.

"Just this moment I opened the book at random and came upon 'The City of Dust,' a powerful piece of symbolism; and on the very next page that won-

derful bit of authentic poetry, 'Let me live out my years in heat of blood;' and across from it that cry to the 'Star-Flinger, Beauty-Builder, Shaping Dream,' which at some time or other we have all made, but with less art. It sums up the mood, the lure that must have called Arthur Upson away ere he 'became too much the kin of dust.'

"In 'The Last Altar,' you have a masterly poem, one that it were superfluous to praise. I do not know anything to set beside the lines, 'For once, as in Apocalyptic vision, etc.' I feel indeed that you *will* 'build great Love an altar,' and have already begun to build it in such altogether spiritual and deeply human poems as 'The Ancient Story' and 'Resurrection.'

"I am so glad you have written these poems, have seen so deeply and with such spiritual vision, and that you put that note of the Eternal Spirit of Things, the note that makes immortal a poem like Dowson's 'Cynara,' when its verbal magic alone could scarcely do it, into your beautiful poem, 'Let Down Your Hair.' The total effect of this poem is spiritual, and everywhere throughout your work is the vision that, coupled with the free and virile beauty of touch, makes your work so new and arresting. I have not half mentioned the poems that I like; the first three particularly, then 'Longing,' 'Come Back,' 'At Dawn,' 'Recognition,' which has some of your most authentic poetry, and, of course, others. You have been so wise in editing down your work and keeping back your juvenalia. That is the fatal mistake of so many.

"I thank you for the rare pleasure your work has given me."—Jessie B. Rittenhouse, Author of "*The Younger American Poets.*"

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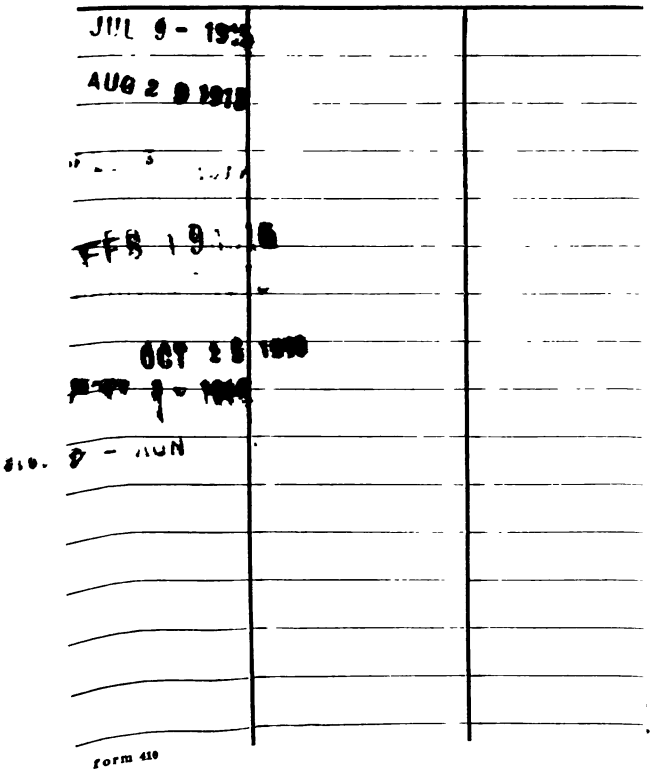

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